



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
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www.va.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 4, 1997

Washington, D.C. -- Under an agreement between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD), active duty military personnel should have an easier process for and get faster decisions on their disability compensation claims as well as their eligibility for VA health care.

When fully implemented, the new national policy calls for separating or retiring servicemembers expecting to file a claim for VA disability compensation to undergo a single physical exam prior to discharge. The exam will meet VA requirements for claims determinations, as well as DoD needs for a separation medical examination. The new policy will be phased in as expeditiously as possible as details are worked out at the local level.

Previous procedures required two separate examinations several months apart. Until now, military personnel have first had to get a DoD physical exam prior to discharge from active duty. These personnel then usually have to undergo a second exam by VA after filing claims for disability compensation because of differences between VA and DoD protocols. The results of these examinations are a determining factor in eligibility for VA health care.

The new national policy was spearheaded by VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Kenneth W. Kizer and DoD Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Dr. Edward D. Martin following months of work on this and other matters of joint interest.

Kizer said, "This change will help us avoid unnecessary or redundant physical exams, improve the quality of the examination process, and improve service for separating servicemembers by eliminating lengthy delays in claims decisions and health-care eligibility determinations. We are hopeful the new policy also will enhance ongoing efforts to reduce the time it takes to process compensation claims and, further, it should reduce costs."

Martin said, "By reengineering the system to require only one physical, we are making life easier for our beneficiaries. This is a good news story."

In pilot tests of the dual-purpose exam at VA and Army facilities, claims processing time was reduced to less than one-third of national levels under the existing system. The current national average for processing an original compensation claim is 133 days.

Under the new policy, VA physicians generally will conduct the pre-discharge exams. In areas where VA physicians are not available, DoD physicians will conduct the exams according to VA protocols.

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